

NEWS

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High Desert Corridor Draws International Interest

SAN BERNARDINO – A standing-room-only crowd of representatives from top U.S. and international engineering and financial firms packed a room today anxious to ask about how they can participate in building a major new expressway across the High Desert in a groundbreaking public-private effort.

“To have serious international interest in the High Desert Corridor is monumental proof of the need that exists for this expressway in both San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties,” said Brad Mitzelfelt, chairman of the High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Authority and also a San Bernardino County supervisor. “This proves the Governor’s recent call to build new infrastructure through public-private partnerships can attract top engineering and financial firms.”

In addition to firms from the United States, firms from England, Spain, Australia and Canada were in attendance.

“This is exactly the kind of project the governor envisioned, one that has profound and sustainable benefits for economic development, air quality, and traffic relief throughout the region,” Mitzelfelt said.

The High Desert Corridor would get a major kick start if the California Transportation Commission agrees to fund a separate part of the project that would link Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville with Interstate 15. That section, called High Desert Corridor Phase 1a, is in the running for money from Proposition 1B, the \$20 billion infrastructure bond approved by voters in 2006.

“If we get money for that initial section, the rest of the project will happen even faster, bringing terrific benefits to all of Southern California,” Mitzelfelt said.

The High Desert Corridor Phase 1a is one of four projects submitted for funding from Proposition 1B by San Bernardino Associated Governments, the county’s transportation authority.

The High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Authority comprises San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties, and its Board of Directors includes representatives from the High Desert cities of Adelanto, Apple Valley, Victorville, Lancaster and Palmdale.

The JPA in December issued a Request for Proposals asking engineering and financial firms to submit strategies for how to finance and build the project. The proposals are due back in mid March.

Today, a bidders conference was held at the San Bernardino County Department of Public Works office, where firms interested in the project could ask questions. The packed room included about 75 representatives from numerous firms interested in participating in the project.

The High Desert Corridor would run about 50 miles from Palmdale to Victorville as a brand new expressway.

“The High Desert Corridor will take thousands of trucks off crowded freeways and highways in the Inland and High Desert valleys, and help spur growth of high paying logistics jobs in the desert,” Mitzelfelt added. “That means many High Desert residents won’t have to drive down the Cajon Pass to find good jobs. And it helps relieve traffic congestion and improve air quality.”

The Joint Powers Authority was created in 2006 as officials in both counties and in Congress recognized the need to create a new east-west corridor between the two counties. The route is especially important to provide an alternative for the thousands of trucks carrying goods from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach as international trade continues to increase.

The High Desert is the one place with enough land to accommodate the millions of square feet of new warehousing and distribution centers that are required to serve burgeoning international trade that supplies goods to the western United States.

Southern California Logistics Airport, the former George Air Force Base in Victorville, will be home to a major new multi-modal center, where containers are moved among aircraft, trains and trucks. If the containers stay on trains from the port to such an “Inland Port” complex, that will mean fewer trucks in the urbanized basins.

Los Angeles County plans to build a similar facility in Palmdale.